



Appalachian Regional Ministry

A.R.M. Journal

Building Bridges of Hope and Change through Volunteer Missions

Appalachian Partnership Marks 10 Years

Just the Facts: during the past 10 years

- Over 450,000 short-term mission volunteers have served in Appalachia.
- Over 40,000 salvation decisions have been made.
- Over 10,000 homes have been repaired
- A.R.M. has grown from 9 partnering state conventions to 13 partnering state conventions

By Carol Pipes, NAMB Baptist Press

HURRICANE, WV — Winding roads and switchback curves punctuated by tiny hamlets mark the landscape of Appalachia -- a 205,000-square-mile, mountainous stretch from Alabama to New York. The region covers all of West Virginia and parts of 11 other states, including 39 of the nation's 100 poorest counties.

The steep mountains and rugged roads have kept Appalachians isolated from the rest of the country and from outsiders' involvement in their lives, contributing to a distinct mountain culture.

It's been 44 years since Lyndon Johnson declared his "War on Poverty" from a ramshackle porch in Inez, Ky. Since then, the region has seen quite a bit of progress, but the current economic crisis in the U.S. has made a tough situation worse. More and more families are finding it difficult to make ends meet. In Clay County, Ky., for example, the median income per household is less than \$21,000 a year, with 41.9 percent of the population living



North American Mission Board missionary Bill Barker, director of Appalachian Regional Ministry, brings thousands of volunteers to the region every year to assist ministries and churches in providing for the physical and spiritual needs of the people. Photo by Carol Pipes.

below the poverty line.

But hope comes in the form of food, clothing, missionaries and volunteer labor as Southern Baptists wrap their arms around Appalachia.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Appalachian Regional Ministry (A.R.M.). Led by North American Mission Board national missionary Bill Barker, A.R.M. combines church planting, home repair, food pantries, clothing closets, evangelism, literacy and medical missions in an effort to impact lives in Appalachia with the Gospel. What began as the dream of one man, James Porch, executive director of the Tennessee Baptist

Convention, has now flourished into a network of ministries across the region.

"Traveling into the area to preach in rural mountain churches or visiting directors of missions, a consciousness prevailed and beckoned me each time I left the area," Porch said. "I knew we needed to find a way to be the hands and feet of Jesus to the people living in the hills of Tennessee and the rest of Appalachia.

"These people -- often victims on a corporate ledger sheet of a coal company and short-term memory of well-intended benevolent efforts

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The people of Appalachia have an independent spirit with a deep sense of and belief in God. While religion is important in Appalachia, the reality is that more than 65 percent of Appalachians are unchurched -- as much as 90 percent in some counties.



In the picture on the right, NAMB Missionary Bill Barker (left) stops by to check on God's Appalachian Partnership directed by Mission Service Corps missionary Lynn Wagoner (right). GAP assists families with food as well as clothing, personal products, household items and cleaning supplies, many of which can't be bought with food stamps. They also provide job training and home repairs. Every person who comes through the door hears the Gospel – with more than 300 decisions for Christ in 10 years. Photo by Carol Pipes.

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-- clarified a question I felt responsible to answer," Porch said. "Could Baptists of the Appalachian states come there ready to honor the mountain culture, minister alongside the folk, share Christ and join in responding to the suffering caused by poverty, harsh weather, limited educational opportunities and seasons of despair? The answer is the current state of the Appalachian Regional Ministry."

From the beginning, A.R.M. was a state convention executive director-driven ministry, working closely with the local Baptist associations and churches. Today, A.R.M. entails a partnership of 13 state conventions, the North American Mission Board and Woman's Missionary Union and is supported through the

Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions.

"A.R.M. has been a great blessing, especially to West Virginia," said Terry Harper, executive director of the West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists. "Only eternity will tell the whole story of lives touched and changed because of the ministry of A.R.M."

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Decades of exploitation by outsiders has led to an understandable mistrust of strangers. But Southern Baptists have found a way to endear themselves to residents by meeting physical and spiritual needs. Barker and state convention leaders believe A.R.M. shows the strength of Southern Baptists working cooperatively together.

"Appalachian Regional Ministries represents Southern Baptists at our best, ministering in one of the most challenging environments in America," said Bob White, executive director of the Georgia Baptist Convention. "The poverty of Appalachia is legendary, but Southern Baptist state conventions that border the area in partnership with the North American

Mission Board are having a huge impact for Christ across the region.

"Bill Barker has proven to be a seasoned spiritual leader for this incredible ministry that just keeps growing under his leadership as more and more volunteers make their way into Appalachia to share Christ and as hundreds are coming to faith in Jesus Christ," White said. "This is one outstanding example of how the North American Mission Board and state conventions partner in reaching our nation for Christ."

The faith of Barker -- himself a West Virginia native -- and his love for his fellow Appalachian people continually fuel his passion for the ministry. Because volunteers are the backbone of A.R.M., Barker spends much of his time connecting volunteers with the many ministries dotting the Appalachian landscape.

"Bill has traveled the hollers, hills and hamlets of Appalachia making connections and spreading the love of the Gospel," Harper said. "He has brought literally thousands of volunteers to this region and they have been used in marvelous ways."

"It's fun to watch God at work," said Barker, who has seen God open doors for ministry throughout the region. "We can't sit here and imagine the next thing God's going to do."

Barker has learned not to set parameters on God, "because

He's way ahead of us."

In 10 years, A.R.M. has mobilized 450,000 volunteers, who have tackled 10,000 home repairs, partnered with 100 ministry centers and assisted 100 church planters. Even as the economy has slumped, A.R.M. has seen an increase in the number of volunteers.

"It's a clear demonstration of what partnership can accomplish when you look at the number of volunteers, the number of professions of faith and the support of ministry centers," said Mickey Caison, leader of NAMB's adult volunteer mobilization team. "But it is still a largely unchurched and under-evangelized region. We have much more work to do."

As A.R.M. looks to the future, the plan is to broaden its scope toward the cities of Appalachia - places like Pittsburgh where children grow up without ever hearing about Jesus. What A.R.M. has done is help remind Southern Baptists that missions also is "here at home," Barker said.

And Barker knows something about home missions. He was born and raised in a small coal camp in West Virginia. God called him to return home -- after a 32-year absence -- to serve as A.R.M.'s director. He drives about 55,000 miles a year bringing food, clothing and hundreds of volunteers to the mountains. He's seen God provide in small and tremendous ways over the past 10 years.

Last Christmas, Barker picked up a load of clothes in Pennsylvania and drove to the Freeda Harris Baptist Center in Lookout, Ky., where NAMB missionaries Greg and Alice Whitetree have been serving the past 26 years.

"We had a little boy in our community who wanted a pair of jeans for Christmas," Alice recalled. "He'd never had new jeans before. We didn't have any jeans donated that year, and we hated to disappoint him."

But God had not forgotten about that little boy. The Whitetrees were surprised when Barker pulled into their parking lot pulling a trailer two days after Christmas. As they unloaded the trailer and started going through the boxes of clothes, Barker recounts: "From across the room I heard Alice whooping and hollering. We all came running." They gathered around Alice as she held up a brand-new pair of jeans, the exact size needed for the little boy.

Similar stories of provision are told throughout the mountains where God's people are praying, serving and aware that He has not forgotten the men, women and children of Appalachia.

Carol Pipes is a writer for the North American Mission Board. To learn more about the Appalachian Regional Ministry and how you can be involved in short-term volunteer missions or to assist with food, clothing, school supplies or home repairs, visit www.arministry.org. A.R.M.'s



Greg Whitetree, director of the Freeda Harris Center in Pike County, Ky., since 1983, leads groups of volunteers to provide after-school and summer activities for local kids, a food pantry and clothing closet, G.E.D. and literacy classes, as well as special seasonal programs. Last Christmas they helped provide toys to more than 2,000 children. Photo by Carol Pipes.

13 state convention partners are the West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists, Tennessee Baptist Convention, Kentucky Baptist Convention, Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia, Virginia Baptist Mission Board, Georgia Baptist Convention, State Convention of Baptists in Ohio, Alabama Baptist Convention, Baptist Convention of Maryland-Delaware, Baptist Convention of New York, Baptist Convention of Pennsylvania-South Jersey and South Carolina Baptist Convention.

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**Southern Baptists on Mission in
Appalachia**

Appalachian Regional Ministry is an intentional missions response to the spiritual and physical needs of persons living in the Appalachian region to mobilize Southern Baptists and their resources to provide ministries, to evangelize the lost, to assist existing churches and to start new churches in the multi-state region of Appalachia.

Appalachian Regional Ministry is a Cooperative Program ministry of thirteen Southern Baptist State Conventions in the ARM region in partnership with the North American Mission Board and the Woman's Missionary Union.

A.R.M. Journal is a publication of Appalachian Regional Ministry
Bill Barker, Editor

**On the web at
www.arministry.org**



Above: Missionaries Greg and Alice Whitetree of the North American Mission Board, who serve at the Freeda Harris Baptist Center in Lookout, Ky., provide after-school programs, emergency food and clothing for people in the community as part of Southern Baptists' Appalachian Regional Ministry. Photo by Carol Pipes.

Left: The board of directors for Southern Baptists' Appalachian Regional Ministry presented this two-foot coal sculpture of coal miner "Mac Dowell" to the North American Mission Board in recognition of 10 years of partnership and ministry. Part of a limited edition series, Mac Dowell honors the men who opened the first mines in McDowell County, W.Va., and represents the tens of thousands of men and women who have mined coal in Appalachia. Photo by Carol Pipes.